

Exhibition and Publication Project Update December 2015



Through Darkness to Light

Seeking Freedom on the Underground Railroad

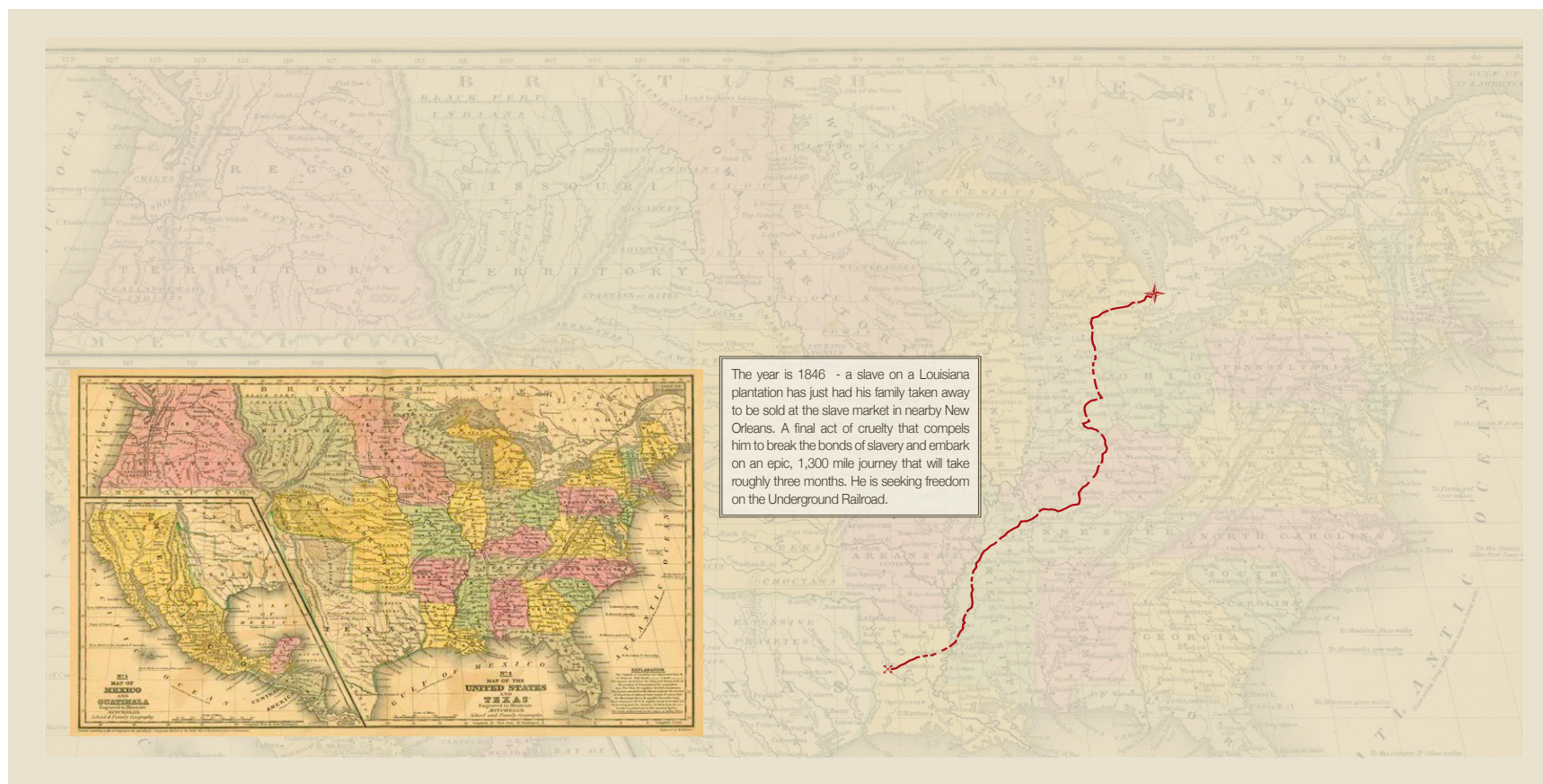
jmb | Jeanine Michna-Bales

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CONTENTS | *THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT: Seeking Freedom on the Underground Railroad*

PROJECT INTENTIONS	03 - 04
Overview and Background	
Project Purpose	
Traveling Exhibition	
Fine Art Prints	
PROJECT STATUS	04
Exhibition Prints	
Publication	
CONTACT DETAILS.....	04

ABOUT THE ARTIST: Jeanine Michna-Bales	05
Biography	
Résumé CV [abbreviated]	
MAP OF DOCUMENTED ROUTE	02
TIMELINE OF SLAVERY IN THE U.S.	09
SELECTED IMAGES	06 - 09
Complete Caption Information	10 - 11



Map of the documented route, ca. 1848

PROJECT INTENTIONS | *THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT: Seeking Freedom on the Underground Railroad*

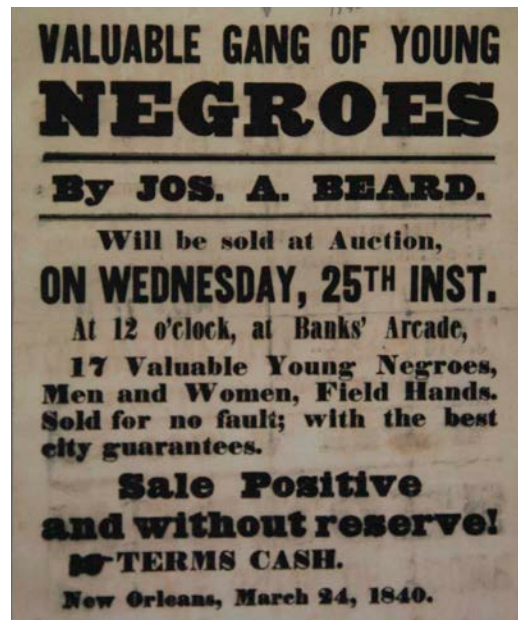
Overview and Background

They left during the middle of the night—oftentimes carrying little more than the knowledge that moss grows on the north side of trees. An estimated 100,000 slaves between 1800 and the end of The Civil War in 1865 chose to embark on this journey of untold hardships in search of freedom. They moved in constant fear of being killed outright or

recaptured then returned and beaten as an example of what would happen to others who might choose to run. Under the cover of darkness, ‘fugitives’ traveled roughly 20 miles each night traversing rugged terrain while enduring all the hardships that Mother Nature could bring to bear.

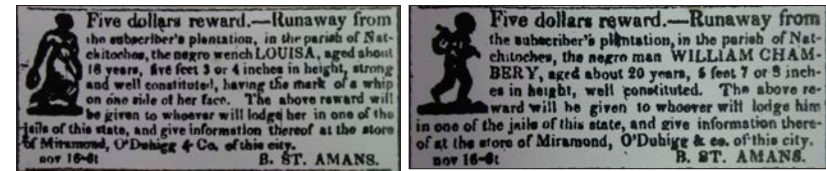
Occasionally, they were guided from one secret, safe location to the next by an ever-changing, clandestine group known as the Underground Railroad. Whether they were slaves trying to escape

or free blacks and whites trying to help, both sides risked everything for the cause of freedom. From the cotton plantations just South of Natchitoches, Louisiana all the way north to the Canadian border, this series of photographs can help us imagine what the long road to freedom may have looked like as seen through the eyes of one of those who made this epic journey.



Slave Auction Advertisement from the *Daily Picayune*, 1840

Photographer Jeanine Michna-Bales has spent over a decade meticulously researching ‘fugitive’ slaves and the ways they escaped to freedom. Due to the secrecy surrounding the Underground Railroad, research is still coming to light. The unnumbered routes of the Railroad encompassed countless square miles. The path Michna-Bales documented encompasses roughly 2,000 miles. It is based off of actual sites, cities and places that freedom-seekers passed through during their journey. Some locations are word-of-mouth and careful consideration has been taken into account in relation to this. But, to disregard these places seems equally dangerous because of the verbal nature of the Railroad itself.

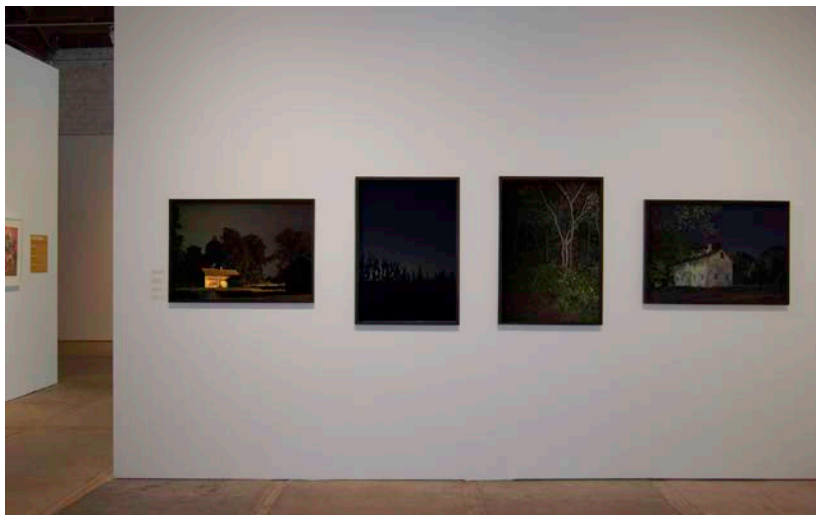


Runaway Slave Ads *The New Orleans Bee*, November 16, 1833 “Runaway Slaves” Oxford University Press, 1999

Project Purpose

Many books have been written over the years on the subject, but because of its secretive nature, there is very little visual documentation of the Underground Railroad. The goal of this project is to provide a sense of what it would be like to take this journey out of bondage; to run in fear for roughly three months with very little help along the way, seeking that fundamental human right of freedom. In today’s America, as we become more and more diverse and cross-cultural, Michna-Bales believes that an appreciation and understanding of the experience—and those who lived through it—is more relevant than ever. The Underground Railroad united people from different races, genders, social levels, religions and regions in a common and worthwhile cause. It was the first Civil Rights Movement within America. Michna-Bales hopes the project makes people want to learn more, ask questions and open a dialogue on the subject, and in the end, provide a better understanding of where we all came from.

PROJECT INTENTIONS CONT'D | *THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT: Seeking Freedom on the Underground Railroad*



The Curve exhibition at the Center for Contemporary Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico

Traveling Exhibition

Mid-America Arts Alliance, working with ExhibitsUSA, is currently booking a 5-year tour in 7-week increments. It will launch in February of 2017 and is geared towards local and regional venues. The exhibition will feature about 50 original journey images accompanied by facsimiles of historical documents, newspaper ads, personal correspondence from abolitionists, actual freedom-seeker narratives and more that together tell the story of the Underground Railroad.

Each image in the series is produced as a digital chromogenic print on Kodak Endura Premier Lustre paper. In addition to the journey images and ephemera, quotes from Underground Railroad participants will be intermixed, in order to bring their voices back to life. Extended captions adding personal, regional and historical context will add an additional layer of context.

The artist is also looking into a Fine Art Traveling Exhibition that will mount all 82 of the journey images and will travel National and International Fine Art Museums.

Fine Art Prints

Images are captured digitally and are printed in three different sizes: 18 x 12.5, 24.5 x 17 and 36 x 25 as digital chromogenic prints on Kodak Endura Premier Lustre paper. The panoramic image is printed at 12.5 x 52, 17 x 70.75 and 104 x 25. All sizes are in inches. Edition sizes for the series are 15, 9 and 8 respectively (+ 3 artist proofs).

PROJECT STATUS

Exhibition Prints

An exhibition of photographs can be generated at this time and many of the images from the series have already been included in various group shows around the country. Ten images are currently on display in the *Moving Walls 23: Journeys* group exhibition at the Open Society Foundations offices in New York City through May of 2016.

Publication from Princeton Architectural Press

The artist is currently working with her editor at Princeton Architectural Press fine-tuning the trade publication on the series. It will feature all 82 of the original journey photographs along with quotes from various Railroad participants, a diverse sampling of related ephemera and various essays about the history of slavery and the Railroad and its relevance to our society today. Release date is February of 2017.

CONTACT DETAILS

To discuss bringing this exhibition to your community, or to acquire fine prints, please contact the artist directly via email or phone. For the ExhibitsUSA Traveling Exhibition, please visit eusa.org/exhibit/Underground or contact Kathy Dowell at Mid-America Arts Alliance.

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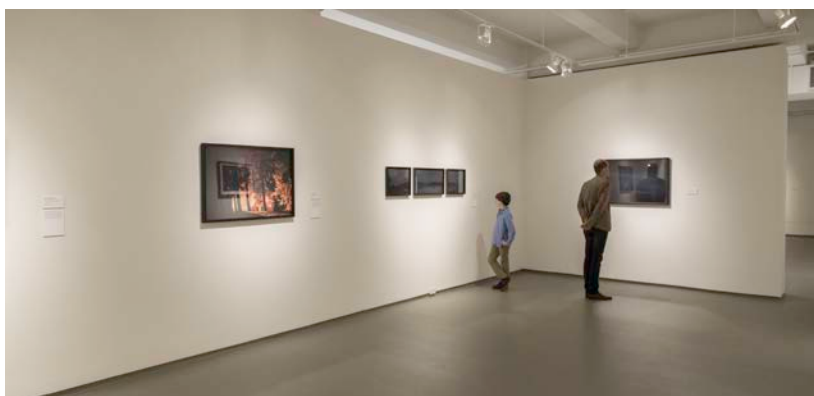
ABOUT THE ARTIST | *THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT: Seeking Freedom on the Underground Railroad*

Biography

Michna-Bales' work explores the relationships between what has occurred, or is occurring, in our society and how people have chosen to react to those events. She thoroughly researches each topic - considering different viewpoints, causes and effects and political climates - and often incorporates that research into her projects through extended captions, placed text, and/or audio.

Whether exploring the darkened stations along the Underground Railroad, long-forgotten nuclear fallout shelters, or the invisible earthquake epicenters of environmental turmoil, she seeks out places that are hidden all around us in plain sight. Each, with its own story begging to be told and lessons waiting to be shared.

Images from *Through Darkness to Light: Seeking Freedom on the Underground Railroad* have appeared in group shows around the United States, including *Moving Walls 23: Journeys* currently at Open Society Foundations in New York, *Southern Exposure: Portraits of a Changing Landscape* at MOCA | Jacksonville and have been featured in numerous online blogs and publications, including *Transition* from Harvard University, *Geo Histoire*, *Lenscratch*, and *Wired Raw File*. In 2014, she was named to the Photolucida Critical Mass Top 50. A publication of her Underground Railroad series will be released in February 2017 from Princeton Architectural Press. And a traveling exhibition of the same body of work will launch at the same time to be shown in various venues across the United States and Canada for five years.



Southern Exposure: Portraits of a Changing Landscape Group Exhibition at MOCA | Jacksonville in 2015. Participating Artists were Jeanine Michna-Bales, William Christenberry, Deborah Luster, Sally Mann, Richard Misrach, Andrew Moore and Alec Soth.

CV | Résumé MORE ONLINE

Solo Exhibitions

- 2017–2022 **Through Darkness to Light; *The Underground Railroad: Photographs of a Path to Freedom***; ExhibitsUSA; Various Venues in U.S. and Canada
- 2017 **Through Darkness to Light**; Arnika Dawkins Gallery; Atlanta, GA
- 2015 **Through Darkness to Light**; Denison Museum; Granville, OH

Group Exhibitions

- 2016 **Frack-tured**; *Perspectives* Group Exhibition; Longview Museum of Fine Arts; Longview, TX; Jan. 16th – Feb. 20th
- 2015 **Frack-tured**; *Newspace Now: 2015 Members' Salon* Group Exhibition; Newspace Center for Photography; Portland, OR
- Through Darkness to Light**; *Critical Mass Top 50* Group Exhibition; GuatePhoto International Photography Festival; Antigua, Guatemala
- Through Darkness to Light**; *Moving Walls 23: Journeys* Group Exhibition; Open Society Foundations; New York, NY; Moves to Washington D.C. in 2016
- Through Darkness to Light**; *Southern Exposure: Portraits of a Changing Landscape* Group Exhibition; MOCA | Jacksonville, FL
- 2014 **Through Darkness to Light**; *Newspace Now: 2014 Members' Salon* Group Exhibition; Newspace Center for Photography; Portland, OR
- Through Darkness to Light**; *The Curve* Group Exhibition; CENTER Award Winners Traveling Show; Colorado Photographic Arts Center; Denver, CO
- Through Darkness to Light and Fallout**; *32nd Annual Juried Membership Exhibition*; Juror Malcolm Daniel; Houston Center for Photography; Houston, TX
- Through Darkness to Light**; *The Curve* Group Exhibition; CENTER Award Winners Show; Center for Contemporary Arts; Santa Fe, NM
- Through Darkness to Light**; *NOPA Member's Exhibition*; New Orleans Photo Alliance; New Orleans, LA

Awards

- 2015 **Through Darkness to Light**; [2015 and 2014] *Lange-Taylor Prize Semifinalist*; Center for Documentary Studies; Duke University
- 2014 **Through Darkness to Light**; 2014 CDS/Honickman *First Book Prize Finalist*; Center for Documentary Studies; Duke University
- Critical Mass Top 50*; Photolucida; Portland, OR
- Beth Block Juried Membership Honoraria*; Houston Center for Photography

